

Community colleges look to change open door policy

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The State Board of Community Colleges recently voted to advance a change in policy allowing community colleges in North Carolina to deny admission to applicants deemed an "articulable, imminent and significant threat to the applicant or other individuals."

"What the state board is doing here is responding to the national threat which has occurred at Virginia Tech and now with the student at Tucson," said **Dennis King, the vice president for student services at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College**. "The community college board has asked for a change in administrative code as it pertains to admissions that will allow us to take action against someone who manifests inappropriate behavior during the admissions process."

The community college system currently implements an open door admissions policy, in which applicants with a high school diploma or equivalent are accepted.

"They are slightly closing the

door to an open door policy at community colleges," King said.

This amendment, which could begin as soon as April 1, would streamline applicants seen as a potential risk and ultimately deny them admission if determined to be a danger to other students.

"I can understand where (this policy) is coming from," said **Jacqueline McHargue, the dean of students at UNC Asheville**. "I think our community college colleagues with their open door admissions do face challenges that we do not as an institution during their admissions process."

The discussion surrounding this policy began in August, and initially stemmed from the Virginia Tech shootings.

"I do understand the great need for protecting students. It is scary, and it does seem that mental health issues are on the rise," said **Anna Bauguess, counselor and case manager at UNCA's Health and Counseling Center**.

Some college students and civil rights leaders said they are concerned with the vague wording of the new code, and worry

those with mental health issues and criminal backgrounds may be categorized in an unfavorable way by colleges taking the policy too far.

"It doesn't really make me feel safer. It just makes me feel like the government is trying to control more things," **A-B Tech freshman Sierra Chase** said.

The policy does not specifically explain what determines a student as a threat, allowing each individual college to make a judgment at their own discretion.

"The energy spent on passing this ban would be better spent discovering new ways to make education more accessible to our classmates and colleagues who are limited not by some perceived shortcoming they possess, but rather by poor planning and design on the part of the college," said **Katie Sue Campbell, a senior women's studies major at UNCA**.

Dean McHargue said the policy could be beneficial if the central factor in refusal of admission is behavior-related.

"I would say behavior is key," McHargue said. "It really needs to be tied to behavior, and if they are able to use this

policy where behavior is what's being focused on, then I think it would be more manageable than something that's very general and open to different levels of interpretation."

King said the wording is very vague and it will be up to each school to define the meaning of this new code. He said A-B Tech will not be looking at mental health records and will not use criminal backgrounds as determining factors for admission.

"To determine a threat, I tend personally to look for a specific action directed at one individual," King said.

King also said he feels this policy should be used sparingly in the best interest of the entire student body.

"If a certain person seems sketchy, I think it would be OK to make some sort of assumption if the school felt they needed to," **A-B Tech freshman Julie Brandon** said.

The amendment requires an explanation submitted from the admissions office regarding refusal of admission and details about when and how an applicant would be eligible to re-apply. An appeals process also

must be offered.

Dean McHargue encourages students to obtain a copy of the policy if they are concerned.

"I think the big picture is what's important to look at with a policy this big," McHargue said. "A lot of this comes from wanting to take care of students and protect students, and that's understandable. I think it's just making sure we're looking at it in a very complete way."

Bauguess said policies like this one are important, but it is hard to know how it will be received and how effective it will be.

"It is a really complex question," Bauguess said in response to the issue of keeping students safe while protecting students' rights.

"There's no certain way to go about answering it. Everything is on a case-by-case basis, and it takes a lot of work, a lot of collaboration. Other people listen to that and put it all together like a puzzle. You never know if you have all the pieces. The main goal is to make sure people are getting the education they want and that they are going to be safe while getting it," she said.

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parative literature, German and art. All three of those funnel into what I want to do. The language has definitely helped because a lot of the things I need are published in German and French," Klinger said.

When asked to give advice to the students at UNCA, **David Edward Jensen, president and executive producer of Modern Beat Productions, LLC and Modern Beats Digital Records**, said networking while in college matters.

"Be proactive, find what you want to do, cultivate the relationships with your classmates and professors and find the people with the most talent in your major. Those people can be your co-workers in the future," Jensen said.

Jensen also said an internship

could be the best way to get a foot in the door to a dream job.

"Internships are really big, and if you can find one that might turn into a job, start at the bottom and work your way up. That looks fantastic to employers," Jensen said.

Recent UNCA graduate Sheila Steelman said she landed the title associate director of communications at Asheville School straight out of college thanks to the Career Center.

"I was always talking to the career counselors and asking how best to prepare myself for when I graduated. One of the counselors talked to me about planned happenstance. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I pretty much knew what field, so she pretty much told me if I prepared myself and kept having the experience and the classes and the degree, that when it was time for something to fall into place, that I would be ready."



Rachael Fisher - Staff Photographer

Moderator Lorriane Walsh, left, and panelists discussed creative career opportunities. Panelist included recent UNCA graduate Sheila Steelman and Charlotte Street Computer CEO Jennifer Mayer.